The Comanches

567 [422] of trade, and poverty-stricken Shoshones often sold their children to their more prosperous Comanche cognates.

● 641 [727] Some captives became naturalized, free members of the tribe, even respected warriors. The changed status was recognized by a solemn ceremony only after the Comanches felt they ran no risk by such a step. According to the customary procedure, the pipe was passed around the council circle. After smoking, all stood up, each placing his right hand over the heart, then raising it toward the sun, repeating the process while marching around the circle. Then the captive was led before the chief to take the oath, wherein he promised faithfully to perform all the duties of a Comanche warrior, to help provide for, protect, and obey the chief in all things in both peace and war. The person taking the oath was then given a Comanche name and was required to select a family and be adopted by a brother.

422 424 Objects of material culture were personally owned, but the test of ownership was not production so much as use. Clothing was made, for example, by the women, but was owned by the person who wore it. The medicine formula was privately owned, but could be transferred. War honors were a sort of property which might on occasion be transferred, but rather as a mark of esteem and not for economic consideration. Objects jointly used, like the tipi, were usually considered to be the property of the husband.

428 At the time the Comanches were confined upon the reservation, their practices in regard to inheritance were in a chaotic condition. Apparently the whole problem of inheritance was so new to their culture that no established norms had evolved. The Plateau tribes from whom the Comanches had separated themselves when they entered the plains were accustomed to destroy all a man's property at his death. This included clothing, weapons, saddles, tools, war paraphernalia, and horses customarily ridden by the deceased, and in ancient times even the wife. In the early days, the Comanches also sometimes killed the favorite wives of a deceased warrior. Articles of intimate personal use were buried with the corpse; other less important articles were burned. This destruction entailed few hardships and no serious economic loss, since the property was limited to clothing and a few weapons and utensils. When the Comanches acquired horses, inheritance became a serious problem. To slaughter the entire

cutting, as did the other tribes. The Comanches followed the Kiowa practice of delegating the honor[1] to a captive woman who had been faithful to her captor husband. This was but one of the ways of integrating the alien members into the tribal whole.

The ritual of raising the center pole with three false starts before hoisting it into place was done in the common Plains manner. A freshly killed and stuffed buffalo was mounted on the center pole. It is significant that in the crisis of the disappearing herds the Comanches in formulating their Sun Dance placed more than usual emphasis upon the bison.

On the last day of preparation, a scout was sent out to locate a "herd," and on the evening of the fourth day it was announced that it had been located. The Sun Dance proper began with an impounding of the buffalo. Four brave warriors went out some distance from the camp disguised as buffalo. One of them wore the robe of a mangy old bull. An especially outstanding warrior, carrying a bow and a torch, set forth to find them. In time, he found the herd and drove it back to the camp and into the dance lodge, just as used to be done with the old-time corral. Then the dancing could begin.

There were two other bits of dramatic by-play that took place on the fourth day of preparation and thus preceded the hunt. One of them provided comic relief, and the other provided an important bit of symbolism, as did the buffalo hunt. The first of these was the invasion of the clowns, or Mud Men (*sekwitsit puhitsit*). Here was something the Comanches had almost certainly picked up in their visits to the Pueblos, possibly at Taos where they were not infrequently peaceful visitors. This they grafted on to their version of the Sun Dance. The Comanche clowns were "masked" dancers akin to the *koshare* of the Eastern Pueblos. They prepared themselves by the creek, smearing their hair, faces, and bodies with mud. On their heads they wore willow-leaf "helmets" that hung down to their shoulders like semi-masks. About their bodies they wore leaves. On their visages they built up large noses of mud, and each carried a club of willow withes and a wicker shield made of the same material.

Mounting their mud-bedaubed ponies, they charged into the camp, swatting people with their "clubs," chasing dogs about, and generally acting funny. People who were whipped could not remonstrate; they

[1] [i.e., of cutting the Sun Dance center pole. -Analyst]

and child was allotted 160 acres with sections set aside for schools and public institutions. The allotments were to be held in trust for 25 years after which time title was to go to the Indians unless the President extended the trust period. For relinquishing their rights the Indians were to receive two million dollars payable at some unspecified date in per capita payments of $500 each with 5 per cent interest paid annually. The lands were to be free from taxation and could not become subject to indebtedness during the trust period. Thus the Comanche became citizens under the allotment system and rations were withdrawn in 1901. Since these allotments were widely scattered and interspersed with White farms, the development of a tribal community was largely precluded and the process of acculturation thereby hastened.

In summary, the history of Comanche contacts with Western culture shows an early period of vacillating hostile and friendly relations, largely tangential in nature, with the Spanish, French, and Americans which lasted until about the middle of the nineteenth century. That date marked the end of Comanche tribal autonomy and ushered in a period of rapid cultural change. Another fifty years may see the old Comanche culture pass into the legendary as it already has for most of the younger persons today.

3.0. The Comanche language is a member of the far-flung Uto-Aztecan stock first set forth by Buschmann[52] and further delineated by Kroeber,[54] Sapir,[55] and Whorf.[56] Sapir

[52] Johann C. Buschmann, Spuren der Aztekischen Sprache im Norden, Abhandlungen der koeniglichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aus dem Jahre 1854 (Berlin, Germany, 1859).

[54] A. L. Kroeber, Shoshonean Dialects of California, UCPAAE, 4.65-165 (Berkeley, Calif., 1907), and Uto-Aztecan Languages of Mexico, Ibero-Americana, No. 8 (Berkeley, Calif., 1934).

[55] Edward Sapir, Southern Paiute and Nahuatl, a Study in Uto-Aztecan, Part I, JSAP, n.s., 10. 379-425; Part II, AA 17.98-120, 306-28 (1915), and continued in JSAP 11.443-88 (1914), (begun in 1913).

551 ʔahá·ʔ, is also called ʔeʔhá·wiʔ, a meaningless word.

551 563 White surnames liberally sprinkle the Comanche list, but wherever these are found there is usually some degree of White blood.

[162] In addition there are 243 persons listed as having Mexican or Mexican and White ancestry. As descendants of captives these persons have legal status as Comanche.

[641]

551 Among the Mexican names represented are: Cerday, Carpio, Farralla, Gonzales, Luna, Martinez, Madrano, Portillo, Rivas, Robbles, Senoya, Terasas (from the Comanche pronunciation of the Christian name Teresa, tíraasa), Trevino, Viadurri, Vidana, and Villavana.

[563] A great many mixed-bloods carry the name of a forebear who has married into the tribe. Among these names are Smith, Jones, Brown, Glover, Cooper, Chandler, McCarthy, McArthur, Kelley, Le Barre, La Sawyer, Fisher, Dietrich, Risener,

[563] Shoemate, Chisholm, and Fawbush. Quanah Parker, the famous Comanche chief, was the daughter of a White captive, Cynthia Parker. Surprisingly few full-blooded Comanche, however, bear White surnames. The total number does not exceed 20, and they are all younger persons. Some of these names are: Pauline Smith, Perry Lonesome Heath, Roderick Youngman, Joseph Kelly, Darrell Bread, Frank David Bull, Bonnie Louise Plumlee, Pasquerita Pratt, Erwin Lee Cude, and Edith Marlene Johnson. In a few instances the surnames are those of second, White husbands. It must also be noted that several of these names, such as Youngman, Bread, or Bull, could also be English translations of Comanche names.

Mispronunciations and misunderstandings, working in both directions, have led to many curious entries on the tribal rolls. In many cases the agency spelling has obscured the meaning of the Comanche name, or at any rate, has made it ambiguous. White pronunciations have tended to become accepted by the Comanche themselves, especially the younger people, and this is still